

GARTH 205.0004 - CLUSTER 2

*Survey Of World Art I: Prehistoric To Medieval*

Course Enrollment: 50 Students

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## **GENERAL EDUCATION-CURRICULUM INFUSION PROJECT**

### **Greco-Roman Art and the God of Wine and Revelry, Dionysius-Bacchus: Portrayals of Ancient Religion and Social Discourse**

#### **Context**

This in-class lecture followed by a team-based learning (TBL) project forms part of a larger unit within the GARTH 205 course which focuses on the art and building of Ancient Rome (handout below). The unit on Ancient Rome falls in Week 5 of the semester and draws upon discussions of the Greek gods and the polytheistic (pagan) religion of the ancient Mediterranean from the preceding week, Week 4.

#### **Prelude**

Class lecture first considers select monuments from the city of Roman and especially public religious ritual and temple building during the Republican age, followed by traditions in funerary art such as grave markers. In these private tomb monuments, featured are codes for proper behavior in Roman society and moralizing lessons, such as hard work and industry, allegiance to one's family, and allegiance to the state.

#### **Focus on Wine and Dionysius-Bacchus**

In the context of the provincial Roman city of Pompeii, private life and domestic space are explored, with a focus on the Roman atrium house, the "Villa of the Mysteries," which preserves a monumental fresco program in the home's dining room across its four walls. This series of frescoes is referred to as the Dionysiac mystery frieze, c. 60-50 BCE (last item on handout), and portrays scenes of the god of wine and revelry at the center of a private religious ritual. This private religious ritual happens in the context of a symposium, or elaborate meal involving food and wine, overseen by satyrs. The religious event also features the playing of musical instruments, ecstatic dancing by semi-nude female participants, and the whipping of members of the symposium, behavior considered in ancient Roman society outside the norms for proper conduct in the public sphere. In Greek and Roman religion, the religious ecstasy inspired by Dionysius was considered to have both positive effects—including divine inspiration and intellectual enlightenment—and negative effects, as in harm to an individual's health through excess.

The private ritual depicted in the fresco is then contrasted with the staid and somber public religious ceremonies taking place outside, in the open air, before the state-sanctioned temple (for example, the first monument on the handout).

## **TBL Project**

Working in permanent teams of 5-6 members, students are asked first to visually analyze the portrayal of the god Dionysius/Bacchus (a detail) from the fresco program of the Villa of the Mysteries, and to discuss the image in terms of artistic style and composition (TBL worksheet attached).

Next each team is asked to analyze an unknown work of art, a painted vase known as an amphora in the Los Angeles County Museum. On its major side is depicted a somber scene of public ritual, typical of in ancient Greek and Roman religion. Here the god Dionysius/Bacchus prepares to make a libation or offering of wine (at left). He is joined by the goddess of war and wisdom, Athena/Minerva (at right).

Teams are asked to analyze the form and possible function of the painted vase (a wine storage jar), and to discuss the observable differences between the fresco painting and vase painting (range of colors, brushwork, loose execution vs. precise and linear).

Teams are finally asked to draw conclusions about the nature of these two very different scenes of religious ritual involving Dionysius/Bacchus, including their private vs. public contexts, expectations for behavior (freedom in the domestic sphere vs. the maintenance of order by the state).

**IN-CLASS TEAMWORK:**

*The God Dionysius: Art and Private vs. Public Religious Ritual in Ancient Greece And Rome*

**1. WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES OF THE SEATED GOD DIONYSIUS/BACCHUS THAT THE FRESCO PAINTER HAS SELECTED TO HIGHLIGHT IN THE LIFE-SIZE PAINTING?**

**2. UNKNOWN WORK OF ART: TRY TO IDENTIFY THE TYPE OF OBJECT, ITS MATERIAL AND FORM OF DECORATION, ITS CULTURE AND WHAT SCENE IS BEING REPRESENTED?**

**3. IDENTIFY FOUR TECHNICAL OR STYLISTIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FRESCO PAINTING AND THE MEDIUM REPRESENTED BY THE UNKNOWN WORK OF ART:**

**4. WHAT CONCLUSIONS CAN YOU DRAW ABOUT THESE TWO VERY DIFFERENT SCENES, IN LIGHT OF RELIGIOUS RITUAL IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES?**

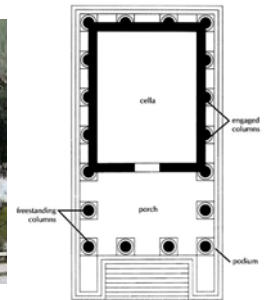
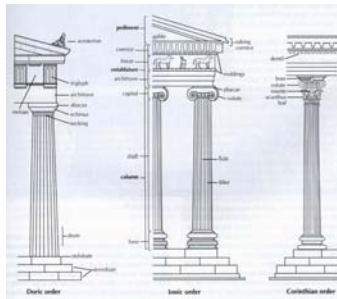
**HANDOUT CHPT. 10  
KEY MONUMENTS**

**Chapter Ten:  
The City & the World: Rome**  
Republic: 509-27 BCE  
Empire: 27 BCE–337 CE



**ROMAN VS. GREEK TEMPLES**

10-3 Temple of “Fortuna Virilis” (Temple of Portunus), Rome, Italy, ca. 75 BCE.



**THE ART OF MEMORY**

10-7 Funerary relief with portraits of the Gessii, from Rome (?), c. 30 BCE, Marble, 2' 1 1/2" high, MFA Boston



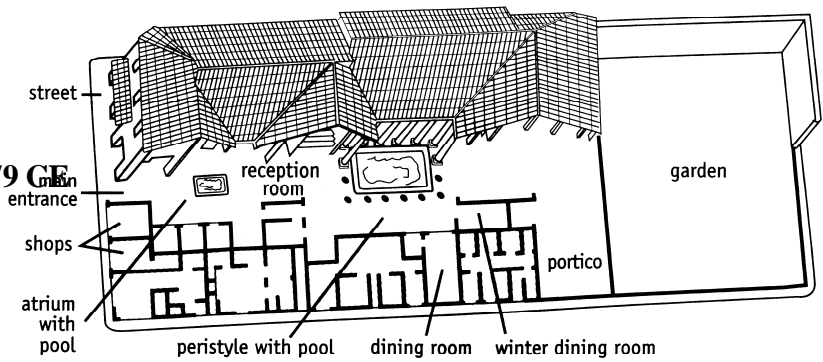
10-10 Relief with funerary procession, from Amiternum, Italy, second half of first century BCE. Limestone, approx. 2' 2" high. Museo Nazionale d' Abruzzo, L'Aquila.



10-56 Funerary reliefs of a vegetable vendor, from Ostia, Italy, second half of second century CE. Painted terracotta, approx. 1' 5" and 11" high, respectively. Museo Ostiense, Ostia



**THE CITY OF POMPEII, DESTROYED 79 CE**



10-15 Atrium of the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, Italy, second century BCE, rebuilt 62–79 CE.



10-18 Dionysiac mystery frieze, Second Style wall paintings in Room 5 of the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy, ca. 60–50 BCE. Frieze approx. 5' 4" high





Figure 10-15 Dionysiac mystery frieze, Second Style wall paintings in Room 5 of the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy, ca. 60–50 BCE. Frieze approx. 5' 4" high.



Detail: Recumbent Dionysius, Dionysiac mystery frieze, Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, Italy, ca. 60–50 BCE. Frieze approx. 5' 4" high.

